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HEG84-199 Topstitching

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Topstitching

This NebGuide describes the use of topstitching on jackets and coats, including techniques and materials required for a professional look.

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Topstitching is an important yet distinctive finishing touch to a jacket or coat. Not only is it decorative, but a line of topstitching helps to keep interfacings in place, creates a neat, crisp edge on a tailored jacket, and accents seams. Topstitching can be done in various places on the garment, including lapels, pockets and pocket flaps, hems, cuffs, pleats, waistbands and major seams.

The key to beautiful topstitching is the thread. It can be done with regular or special topstitching thread. Look on the end of the spool for the label that says "topstitching/buttonhole twist." Note the fiber content. Some are silk, some are 100% polyester and some are polyester wrapped with cotton. Silk twist is recommended for fabrics that will be dry-cleaned, such as silks or woolsens. Polyester twist is a popular alternative because it is easy to care for, is machine washable, costs less and has the smooth, lustrous look of silk. When using regular thread you can achieve the same heavy look by threading two threads through the machine needle. Be sure to use a large enough needle to handle the extra thread. Check the yardage on the spools so you'll be sure to have enough to finish your project.

Topstitching thread requires a size 14 to 16 needle. The buttonhole twist is used in the top-threading of the machine with regular thread wound on the bobbin. For the look of a broken line of topstitching, use a darker color thread on the bobbin.

A looser than normal tension may be required. Use a longer than average stitch length of about 6 to 8 stitches per inch. Be sure to test stitch on scraps of fabric that are the same thickness as your garment.

Straight, even rows of stitching are necessary for a professional look. It is best to use some type of a guideline. The following methods will help you achieve good results.

1. Use the throatplate marking or a piece of masking tape on the throatplate as a guide for the edge of the fabric.
2. Use the edge of the presser foot to help measure equal distances.
3. Purchase special topstitching tape that provides guidelines of various widths.
4. Use transparent tape as a guide, but stitch next to the tape, not through it.
5. Use the right or left needle position.
6. Hand baste guidelines, but don't sew over the basting threads as they will be hard to remove.
7. Use a quilting attachment with a bar, which is good for curves and stitching several rows. A seam guide attachment can also be used.

To keep the fabric smooth as you topstitch, sew with the grain of the fabric in a neck-to-hem direction. When stitching around a front closing, stitch in two segments beginning at the center back and sew toward the hem at the center front.

Always topstitch on the right side of the garment. Topstitch a turn-back lapel on the garment side below the roll line and on the facing side above the roll line. Reverse the stitching where the lapel breaks above the top button.

Never back-stitch when topstitching as it will be very obvious. Instead, leave long thread tails. Pull the topstitching thread to the underside and tie the two threads in a square knot. Thread the tails through a needle, then insert the needle in the underneath layer of fabric only at the knot (*Figure 1*). Bring the needle out a short distance away. Tug gently until the knot pops between the layers. Clip the threads close to the fabric. Another method is to pull the threads to the inside between the facing and garment and tie a knot.

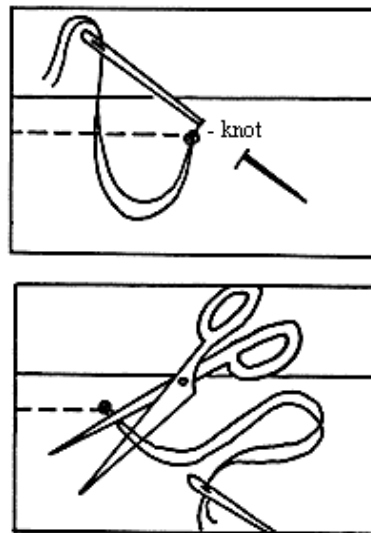


Figure 1. Use a needle to pull knotted topstitching threads through fabric layers to secure stitching.

Figure 2 shows one way to topstitch a notched collar for jackets and coats. Shorten the stitch length as you stitch in the well of the seam so the stitches bury down in the fabric. Lengthen your stitch when you start topstitching on the lapels.

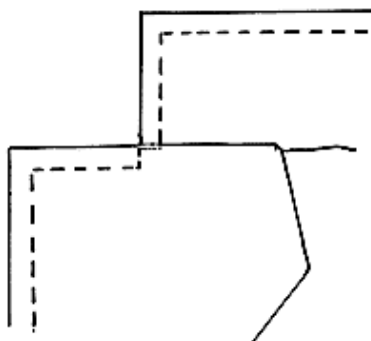


Figure 2. Shorter stitches in the well of seams are less noticeable.

Buttons should not cover the topstitching line when a garment is buttoned. If you anticipate this problem, add extra width to the center front of the pattern or plan for the top stitching line to be closer to the edge of the garment (*Figure 3*).

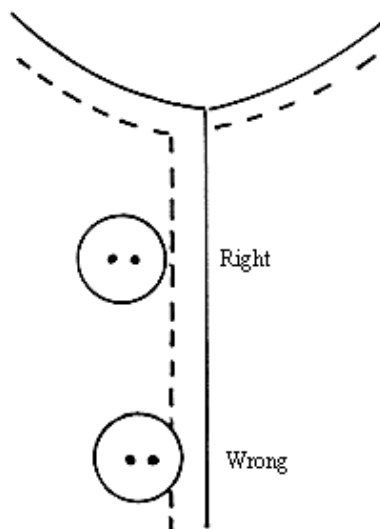


Figure 3. Place topstitching where buttons will not cover it for a more professional look.

Create interesting topstitching effects. Try two or three rows of topstitching (*Figure 4*). Use matching, contrasting, or more than one color of thread. Topstitching can also be combined with different kinds of decorative trims or braids.

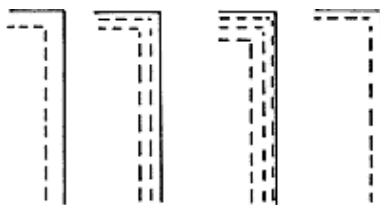


Figure 4. Vary the number and spacing of topstitching rows for added interest.

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